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ABSTRACT

An organizational needs assessment (ONA) process was developed to gather information about the basic skills upgrading needs and issues in the Division of Residence Operations of a state university. Forty-four participants from management, union leadership, and all job levels in the university's custodial and maintenance departments participated in the ONA through focus groups and individual meetings. Two focus groups and varying numbers of individual participants expressed a need for basic skills upgrading in the following areas: English as a Second Language (ESL), reading, mathematics, writing, basic computer skills, oral communication, basic trade skills, and other areas (General Educational Development test preparation, test-taking skills, and Spanish). The ONA participants also emphasized the importance of the following to future basic skills upgrading programs: cultural diversity, job-related content, hands-on training, and accessibility of training to all full- and part-time employees. Short- and long-term recommendations for developing a basic and trade skills development program for the university's custodial and maintenance employees were formulated. (Appended are the focus group agenda, individual meeting questions, and a table detailing the reported need for skills upgrading.) (MN)

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ED 371 123

Organizational Assessment of Basic Skills Needs

at the

University Division of Residence Operations

Final Report

Prepared by

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on behalf of the

Governor's Office of Employee Relations

and the

Civil Service Employees Association, Inc.

April 28, 1993

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Finally, to Lori Zwicker, GOER Project REACH representative, whose vision in fostering innovative, participatory workplace education has been the catalyst for Project REACH and this organizational needs assessment.

Executive Summary

I. Introduction

The goal of the Organizational Needs Assessment was to make short- and long-term recommendations to address basic skills upgrading needs and issues at the University's Division of Residence Operations. Forty-four participants from management, union leadership, and all job levels in the Custodial and Maintenance Departments participated in the assessment through focus groups and individual meetings.

II. Findings

A. Areas for Basic Skills Upgrading and Related Needs

English as a Second Language

Two focus groups and 73% of individual participants identified English-as-a-second-language (ESL) training as a priority basic skills need. Although general ESL classes are currently being offered at the University, participants stressed the need for a job-related ESL program.

Reading

Two focus groups and 70% of individual participants felt there was a need for employees to improve their reading skills. Although job-related reading was emphasized, several participants indicated an interest in improving their non-technical reading and comprehension skills.

Math

Two focus groups and 66% of individual participants identified the need for upgrading basic math skills, including specific trades-related math needs.

Writing

Two focus groups and 62% of individual participants identified writing skills as an area for improvement. They spoke of the need for instruction in clearly communicating thoughts in writing, spelling, penmanship, grammar, and writing resumes.

Basic Computer

Three focus groups and 31% of individual participants spoke of the need to learn basic computer skills. Participants felt that computer skills will be needed by more employees in the future, particularly supervisors, and they also felt that computers could be used to learn other skills such as math, reading, and writing.

Oral Communication

All three focus groups and 23% of individual participants identified oral communication and listening skills as an important need and one that had a significant impact on the work environment as well. Participants felt that communication needed to be improved among workers, between supervisors and workers, between departments, and with University students and Residence Hall staff. They also indicated the need for improving the flow of information to all employees as a related need.

Basic Trades

Two focus groups, several individual Custodial participants, all Maintenance participants, and management and union leadership indicated that there was a need for upgrading basic trades skills. Priority areas were carpentry, plumbing, electricity, and blueprint reading.

Other Basic Skills Areas

Participants also indicated GED-preparation, test-taking skills, and Spanish as areas of need or interest.

B. Cultural Diversity

Issues growing out of the culturally diverse nature of the Residence Operations workforce often centered around communications issues. Participants spoke of problems in communication between English-speaking and limited-English-speaking employees. Participants indicated that this area impacts employees at a personal, feeling level. They also described job-related needs for knowing how to speak English.

C. Participants' Suggestions Regarding Basic Skills Programs

Participants had specific suggestions about basic skills programs. They recommended that the content be job-related, and they stressed the importance of practical, hands-on instruction that was geared to the learning pace and levels of employees. They also recommended that classes be made accessible to all full-time and part-time employees.

III. Recommendations

A. Short-Term Recommendations

The workforce education consultant recommends that the following steps be taken before a plan for Project REACH developed and implemented:

1. Ensure that Project REACH Advisory Committee members read the full report and give their feedback.

2. Provide the opportunity for all Residence Operations employees to receive a briefing on the findings and recommendations from the report.

3. Make the Executive Summary of the report available to all employees. This would include making the Spanish translation of the Executive Summary available to all Spanish-speaking employees.

4. Make the full report available to all employees upon request.

B. Long-Term Recommendations

Develop an action plan with the Project REACH Advisory Committee for providing basic skills upgrading opportunities for Custodial and Maintenance employees. Use the findings from this report and suggestions made by employees as a basis for the plan. As training is developed, involve supervisors, workers, management, and union leadership in determining the content and methodology of each program.

Project REACH programs should be offered on a voluntary basis to employees, with all Custodial and Maintenance employees receiving information about the programs on a timely basis.

Education providers could include GOER/CSEA, BOCES, other area institutions, and consultants. Providers should be skilled in a participatory approach to course development and instruction. Providers should work with the Advisory Committee and GOER/CSEA in ensuring that programs are customized to meet the specific needs of Residence Operations employees.

Following are recommendations for specific programs and related strategies.

Basic Skills Training

1. Develop a *work-related ESL program* for Custodial and Maintenance workers. Because of the differing vocabulary needs and work-related conversation of the two departments, separate ESL courses for workers in each department would have a higher impact and could also generate mutual support among work groups. Involve supervisors and English-speaking workers from each department in determining the vocabulary and conversation skills to be included in the curriculum.

2. Provide a program that teaches *basic math skills* in the context of work-related math tasks in the Custodial and Maintenance Departments. The program could also include pre-requisite math skills required in order to enroll in trades-related training.

3. Provide a *basic reading and writing skills* program that incorporates work-related reading and writing tasks. Use a holistic approach to learning that is based on employees' individual ability levels and learning goals.

4. Offer training in *basic computer skills.* Explore the possibility of a computer-based learning center for Residence Operations employees.

5. Offer training in *oral communication and listening skills.* Build in follow-up activities that are work-related and that encourage employees to apply those skills in daily work relationships.

Trades Training

1. Provide hands-on, practical training in basic trades skills. Based on the results of this needs assessment, the first priority would be *basic carpentry skills,* followed by *plumbing, electricity, and blueprint reading.* Have the courses on-site if possible, and ensure that training meets the specific needs of Residence Operations employees. This would include beginning where workers are in their knowledge of the trade and proceeding at a pace that fits participants' learning rates.

2. Explore ways of providing incentives and support for employees who want to upgrade their skills into more *advanced areas of the trades.*

Other Strategies

1. Implement a *team-based process for evaluating Project REACH.* A team approach to evaluation can build a sense of shared purpose and ownership, and provide valuable guidance for program development. Working with a GOER/CSEA consultant, the Advisory Committee could serve as the core team which would:

   · clarify the goals,
   · identify what is and is not working in the programs,
   · build on Project REACH's strengths, and
   · deal with its limitations.

2. Develop a *book of maintenance terms* for use in:

   · a training session for Residence Hall Directors and University students (see No. 3 below)

   · an ESL program for Maintenance workers, and

   · a trades-related reading and writing program.

   Involve Maintenance staff in deciding which terms to include and in developing working definitions for those terms. In addition to having a workplace-specific learning tool for the programs listed above, staff participation in its development would:

   · build ownership in the programs which use the books,

   · develop teamwork and problem-solving skills, and

   · enhance self esteem by building on workers' knowledge of their trades and the work processes of Residence Operations.

   A similar book of custodial terms could be developed for use in an ESL program for Custodial workers and custodial-related reading and writing instruction.

3. Develop a *training session for Quad and Residence Hall Directors and University students* to acquaint them with "the world of maintenance." The purpose would be to improve communications involving requests for maintenance work. The training would:

   · provide "live-here" staff and students with a better understanding of how the Maintenance Department operates,

   · explain common maintenance terms, and

   · provide practice in using those terms to report maintenance problems.

The main learning tool for this training could be the book of maintenance terms referred to in No. 3 above. To ensure realistic content and to optimize communication benefits, involve maintenance supervisors, workers, and management in determining the content of the training and also in conducting the sessions.

4. Offer a *course in the overall operations of the Division of Residence Operations.* The course would give employees "the big picture" of their Division and its operations and responsibilities. Employees would gain a better understanding their own role and the roles of co-workers in providing the Division's services University residences. An additional outcome of the course could be to enhance teamwork and problem-solving within and between departments.

5. Offer a *stress management course* for all levels of employees. Explore the possibility of instituting an *exercise program,* either as formally-organized classes or as informal access to on-campus exercise facilities.

6. Consider ways that *communication within work groups and between departments* can be improved. This could include regular meetings of supervisors with their work groups as well as interdepartmental planning and problem-solving meetings.

C. Summary Statement

In order for Residence Operations to address the findings and recommendations in this report, it will be necessary to develop a specific plan of action for Project REACH. The implementation of the plan will require the further input, talents, and commitment of all levels of the work force at Residence Operations.

In conclusion, Residence Operations is to be commended for its commitment to the continuing education of its employees and, particularly, for its focus on providing basic skills opportunities for Custodial and Maintenance staff. It is the impression of this consultant that Residence Operations has a rich resource of thoughtful, creative people who can make Project REACH an innovative, cutting-edge example of participatory workplace education.

The Governor's Office of Employee Relations (GOER) and the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) look forward to providing further assistance to this exciting, forward-thinking initiative.

Organizational Assessment of Basic Skills Needs

I. Introduction

This organizational needs assessment was conducted as the first step in the development of a basic skills program sponsored by Project REACH. Project REACH is a workplace basic skills program for State employees represented by the Civil Service Employees Association, Inc. (CSEA). The program is funded and operated by CSEA and the New York State Governor's Office of Employee Relations.

A. Background Information

At a State University, management for the Division of Residence Operations was interested in providing opportunities for the Custodial and Maintenance staff to upgrade their basic skills. The Division Director`s primary goals were (1) to increase productivity through enhanced skills and (2) to prepare employees for promotional opportunities.

In January, 1993, the Division management contacted the New York Governor`s Office of Employee Relations (GOER) to inquire about educational opportunities and resources available through Project REACH. In February, the GOER and CSEA Project REACH representatives met with the Division Director, Assistant Director, and Maintenance Director. As a result of that meeting, it was agreed that Project REACH would:

- design and conduct an Organizational Needs Assessment (ONA);
- provide a written report with specific recommendations; and
- develop and deliver skills upgrading programs recommended in the ONA report and selected by Residence Operations.

A Project Advisory Committee composed of staff from the Custodial and Maintenance Departments, management, and the CSEA local union president was set up. The Committee`s role was to give input on the ONA strategy and resulting recommendations. On March 3, 1993, the GOER representative and the CSEA-LEAP Assistant Director met with the Project Advisory Committee to introduce Project REACH and to describe the ONA process.

A second meeting of the Advisory Committee was held on March 18 with the GOER representative and an outside workplace education consultant to discuss the ONA strategy and to solicit the Committee`s feedback on proposed questions for the focus groups and individual meetings. During this meeting, Committee members recommended that the consultant`s time with individuals be referred to as "meetings" rather than "interviews."

The following day an orientation meeting was held for all interested employees to introduce Project REACH and the ONA and to solicit participants for the focus groups and individual meetings.

B. An Organizational Approach to Basic Skills

The development of the Project REACH workplace program is based on an organizational approach to assessing basic skills upgrading needs which examines those needs in the context of the workplace culture and in relation to other workplace issues. It focuses on all levels of the work force and the organization itself and results in a multi-pronged approach to addressing basic skills. For example, depending on its needs, an organization may decide to:

- integrate basic skills into in-house training
- offer clear writing workshops
- improve communications
- deal with issues of cultural diversity

C. Principles of Good Practice for Workplace Education[1]

Project Reach is guided by the following principles:

1. **There is no "quick fix" to addressing basic skills at the workplace.** A long-term commitment is required. Basic skills upgrading must be part of a larger training and education strategy.

2. **All stakeholders (management, union, and employees) must be involved in setting up a skills upgrading project.** The approach must be participatory from beginning to end. This is the key to a successful project.

3. **Workplace skills upgrading programs must be based on an empowerment model.** The assumption behind this model is that, while people have highly developed skills in some areas, they may need to upgrade their basic skills. Programs must build on the experience, knowledge and good skills that the work force already has. Terms that refer to deficiencies and promote negative stereotypes should be avoided.

4. **Workplace skills upgrading programs must accommodate and respect cultural, linguistic and racial diversity.** Diversity is the reality of most U.S. workplaces. Skills upgrading opportunities must provide equal access and outcomes for all groups. This means that the needs of the work force may need to be met in different ways to achieve the same outcome.

5. **Basic skills must be examined within the context of other workplace issues.** Basic skills needs cannot be separated from other workplace issues. They must be examined in a way that shows how they relate to communication channels, work processes, equipment, existing orientation and training strategies, management style, customer service, and promotion opportunities.

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[1]Source: *An Organizational Approach to Basic Skills,* by Waugh, S. Ottawa YMCA-YWCA, 1992.

6. **Upgrading programs are only one component of managing change.** Workplace skills programs, alone, will not meet all the basic skills needs of a particular workplace. Other activities will need to be undertaken as well.

7. **Workplace basic skills programs will need to be tailored to each workplace and its work force.** Basic skills requirements will vary from workplace to workplace. Each workplace and work force will have its own specific set of needs.

8. **Workplace basic skills programs should be voluntary.** Learning will only take place where participants feel comfortable and have the motivation to learn.

9. **Individual results from skills upgrading programs must be kept confidential.** Program participants must feel secure in knowing that their progress will not be used by union or management to make job-related decisions.

10. **Objectives and expectations must be realistic.** Organizations must set realistic objectives for workplace programs and have reasonable expectations in terms of outcomes.

II. Organizational Needs Assessment Strategy

A. Goal and Objectives

The purpose of the ONA is to have a sampling of the organization identify basic skills upgrading needs and issues. It determines what upgrading programs are desirable and may indicate other strategies to complement training activities. The ONA focuses on the needs of the workplace rather than the needs of individuals.

Goal:

To make short- and long-term recommendations to address basic skills upgrading needs and issues at the University's Division of Residence Operations.

Objectives:

1. To determine the basic skills upgrading needs of Custodial and Maintenance workers.

2. To identify other communication issues that need to be addressed.

3. To identify critical factors which could have an impact on the success of any basic skills programs offered.

B. Methodology

1. Sources of Information

To get a clear, comprehensive picture of the basic skills upgrading needs, the following groups were identified for participation in the organizational needs assessment:

- managers
- supervisors
  - Custodial Department
  - Maintenance Department
- union leadership
- Project REACH Advisory Committee
- staff
  - Custodial and Maintenance Departments
  - a cross-section of job grade levels, gender, experience, and cultural groups

2. Process for Developing the Assessment Strategy

The strategy for the organizational needs assessment was developed in consultation with the Project REACH Advisory Committee. The Committee provided valuable feedback on:

- appropriate methodology
- timing of focus group and individual meetings
- wording of focus group and individual meeting questions
- workplace documents

Confidential focus groups and individual meetings were selected as the main method of assessment. The focus groups would allow for input from a large number of participants. Individual meetings would complement focus groups and allow for input on areas that were more appropriate for one-on-one discussion. For example, some employees would be reluctant to express their views in a group situation or would prefer to talk about their own learning needs and interests in an individual setting.

3. Selection of Participants

Participation in the organizational needs assessment was voluntary, and employees were allowed to select their preference for taking part in a focus group or in an individual meeting. Participants came from all job grade levels in the Custodial and Maintenance Departments, men and women with a wide range of experience and from diverse cultural groups. A chart showing the actual participation appears on page 6.

4. Description of Focus groups, Individual Meetings, and Other Components[2]

The following areas were probed in focus groups and individual meetings:

- basic skills upgrading needs of the workplace
- barriers to written and oral communication
- ways to address basic skills upgrading needs and communication barriers
- vision

Individual meetings tapped into additional areas related to basic skills such as:

- individual learning interests
- recommendations concerning basic skills programs
- potential barriers to learning
- impact of cultural diversity
- training and orientation offered

[2]See Appendices A and B for focus group activities and individual meeting questions.

Participants in ONA

a. Focus Groups	
Custodial:	
Supervisors (SG-11)	2
Janitors (SC-7)	4
Cleaners (SG-5)	6
Maintenance:	
Trades Specialists (SG-12)	6
Maintenance Assistants (SG-9)	4
Laborers (SG-6)	2
Total participants for focus groups:	24

b. Individual Meetings	
Custodial:	
Supervisors (SG-11)	4
Janitors (SC-7)	1
Cleaners (SG-5)	4
Maintenance:	
Trades Specialists (SG-12)	9
Assistants (SG-9)	4
Laborers (SG-6)	1
Management and Union	4
Total participants for individual meetings:	27*
Total Participants:	**44***

c. Other Components

Review of selected workplace documents for the basic skills involved in their use:

- Work Orders
- Supplies Requisition
- Attendance Report
- Absence Report
- Housekeeping General Assessment of Area
- Custodial Quality Control Checklist
- Listing of Job Opportunities
- Dental Claim Form
- brochure describing Leave Donation Program for union employees
- publication describing union tentative contract changes
- various memos

**Seven individual participants had also been part of a focus group.*

Focus Groups

Three focus groups were held. Participants had been grouped according to job grade levels: supervisory-levels, mid-levels, and cleaners and laborers. Each group had employees from both Custodial and Maintenance Departments and represented a cross-section of gender, experience, and cultural groups.

The focus groups lasted approximately two hours. At the beginning of each focus group, the workplace education consultant:

- gave an overview of the purpose and process of the needs assessment,
- described what would take place during the focus group,
- assured participants of confidentiality and anonymity in their responses, and
- defined basic skills.

The focus group format included a variety of activities.

1. Participants were asked to work individually to identify three areas for basic skills upgrading and to note these on 3 x 5 cards. They also identified barriers to written and oral communication.

2. They next worked in small groups to come to a consensus on three areas for basic skills upgrading and three barriers for both oral and written communication.

1a & 2a. Because several participants in the first two focus groups had been uncomfortable with having to write down their ideas, participants in the third focus group were instead asked to work in small groups and select one person to take notes for the group. The consultant assured participants that these notes were only for their own use in reporting back to the larger group and would not be collected at the end of the meeting. This process allowed participants to contribute their ideas without feeling ill-at-ease about having to write them down.

3. The workplace education consultant then facilitated a group discussion during which small groups shared their responses with the large group.

4. The group then brainstormed ways to address training needs and barriers to communication. The consultant recorded the discussion and brainstorming on newsprint sheets, checking with participants for accuracy and thoroughness of what was being recorded.

5. Participants were then asked to work in small groups to develop a vision of what the workplace would look like in one year if the basic skills upgrading needs they had identified were met and the barriers to communication gone. Each vision was presented to the large group.

Individual Meetings

Personal, confidential meetings were conducted with 27 participants. At the beginning of each meeting, the workplace education consultant:

- gave an overview of the purpose and process of the needs assessment,
- described what would take place during the meeting,
- assured participants of confidentiality and anonymity in their responses, and
- defined basic skills.

The process used to conduct the individual meetings was as follows:

- Key areas were probed through the use of open-ended questions. Notes were taken by the consultant during the meeting.

- Participants' responses were often paraphrased by the consultant to check for accuracy and provide the opportunity for further response.

Other Components

The workplace consultant was familiarized with Residence Operations in a variety of ways, including:

- taking a tour of the Campus Residence Halls area
- taking a tour of Maintenance and Custodial work sites
- reading bulletin boards

In addition, the consultant examined several workplace documents for the reading, writing, and math skills required in their use and to understand the role these documents played in the daily work responsibilities of Custodial and Maintenance workers.

5. Value and Limitations of the Assessment

Value of the Process

The organizational needs assessment was designed to be open-ended and to allow participants to give their own opinions and perspectives. In addition, the fact that the workplace education consultant was from outside the University campus with no particular stake or position allowed participants to speak openly and freely.

The validity of the results was confirmed in that participants gave similar responses whether they took part in a focus group or an individual meeting. The fact that different levels of the work force often identified the same issues and made similar suggestions for change is also a check on the validity of the results.

The focus groups were particularly useful in allowing participants to hear their co-workers' perspectives on basic skills issues. Participants used this opportunity for airing concerns and then moved on to offering solutions and recommendations for education programs.

The individual meetings allowed participants to talk about their own learning needs and interests and to speak in more depth about the role of basic skills in daily work responsibilities.

The consultant also used the focus groups and individual meetings to further clarify the purpose and process of the organizational needs assessment and to generate interest and ownership in the education programs that would be planned. [See "Limitations of the Process."]

This type of qualitative assessment taps into the perceptions and opinions of different stakeholder groups. It offers a "snapshot" of the organization at a given point in time and provides a foundation from which the organization can proceed to address basic skills and related issues.

Limitations of the Process

The focus groups and individual meetings were begun before adequate discussion had taken place with the Advisory Committee about the purpose and process of the organizational needs assessment and before this information could be shared in a comprehensive way with the work force. As a result, many participants initially thought the purpose of the meetings was to sign up for or to actually begin education programs. This caused confusion, and some participants were upset at not being given accurate information about the purpose of the meetings or about the entire ONA process.

Because the workplace education consultant was not fluent in Spanish and translated meetings were not able to be arranged, she was unable to meet with Spanish-speaking employees. Thus, the discussion of cultural diversity issues and recommendations about an English-as-a-second-language program reflect only the perspectives of English-speaking or bilingual employees and not those of non-English-speaking workers.

The focus group approach may inhibit the depth of information that an interviewer might elicit in a one-to-one situation. The inhibition may occur because of lack of time or the reluctance of an individual to disclose information in front of a whole group.

Finally, a qualitative assessment is impressionistic in that it identifies the perceptions and opinions of participants and relies on third-party analysis of these perceptions.

6. Data Analysis

Written notes from individual meetings and focus groups were reviewed to determine:

- basic skills upgrading needs,
- barriers to communication and learning,
- related issues,
- suggestions about basic skills education programs, and
- participants` visions for change.

Other relevant information which did not fall into these categories was also noted and included in this report. An analysis of participants` responses can be found under the "Findings Section" of this report.

III. Findings

A. Introduction

Focus group and individual meeting participants represented all job levels from the Custodial and Maintenance Departments. By and large, participants identified similar areas for skills upgrading.

Areas for basic skills upgrading were identified as follows:

- English as a second language
- math
- reading
- basic computer
- writing
- oral communication
- basic trades

Other areas which can be found in this section are:

- barriers to and interest in learning
- place and scheduling of programs
- cultural diversity
- visions of change
- participants` suggestions regarding basic skills programs and complementary strategies

B. Areas for Basic Skills Upgrading and Related Needs

1. English as a Second Language

Participants stated that job-related English-as-a-second-language training is a priority need in both Custodial and Maintenance Departments.

Need for Skills Upgrading

Two focus groups and 73% of individual participants identified English-as-a-second-language (ESL) as a priority skills upgrading need. The need impacts communication, job performance, cultural diversity issues, and customer service in both Custodial and Maintenance Departments. Although some participants indicated an interest in more advanced skills such as improving pronunciation and expanding their knowledge of technical English, the greatest need is for basic job-related ESL education.

ESL classes are already being offered for University employees through BOCES. However, participants indicated several problems with these classes including the fact that the general nature of the curriculum does not directly relate to communication needed on the job.

Participants` Comments[3]

They don`t understand what I say. I ask `Do you understand?` and they say `yes`. They don`t want to show their co-workers they don`t understand.

Supervisors get frustrated. It`s like talking to a wall. Next time, they just give up.

People who can`t speak English can`t talk with people on the job. They`re isolated. It`s really a complex issue.

Some know the basic tools, but need to learn English words for specialty tools.

People need to learn basic [English] conversation. It`s needed to be able to work together.

Workers have to speak with [University] students sometimes. They tell the worker, "I need a broom, I need a mop, etc." and the workers need to be able to understand what they are saying.

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[3]Participants` comments have been chosen to reflect opinions expressed by many who identified a particular issue.

2. Reading

Basic reading skills were identified as a major need among both Custodial and Maintenance workers.

Need for Skills Upgrading

Two focus groups and 70% of individual participants felt there was a need for employees to upgrade their reading skills. Participants said that many people have difficulty understanding and using written information on labels and installation directions for shelving and cabinets. Some were not certain if the problem was limited reading skills or just not taking the time to read carefully. Participants also indicated the importance of being able to read time records and performance evaluations "so that they understand what`s involved by them signing the document." At times people spoke about reading in more general terms, although job-related reading skills were emphasized. Participants agreed that the greatest need is for basic reading skills but several indicated an interest in expanding their own reading into non-technical areas and improving their comprehension skills.

Finally, unlike most other skills discussed by participants, reading is not an easily acknowledged need. The pressure to maintain an appearance of being able to read better than one can is common among adults with limited reading skills. And finding ways of improving those skills at a workplace setting without jeopardizing workers` dignity and confidentiality is a challenging issue.

Participants` Comments

Basic reading is a key issue. A lot of people don`t know how to read.

There is a problem with people misinterpreting work orders. Maybe they didn`t read the work order carefully.

I have heard some people say, "Hey, would you help me read this?"

I need to take reading. Regular reading. I can pronounce [words] but it takes a long time. I`d like to be able to read about sports, stories, things like that.

There is a book of information on all the chemicals that people work with but it`s not being read. Perhaps people can`t read the book and don`t want to embarrass themselves by admitting this.

3. Math

Participants identified the need to upgrade basic math skills in both Custodial and Maintenance Departments.

Need for Skills Upgrading

Two focus groups and 62% of individual participants identified the need for upgrading basic math skills. Some described situations in which limited math skills resulted in waste of supplies. Others said that inadequate math skills affect workers` ability to plan and carry out work assignments. Mistakes on documents such as supply requisitions and time sheets were often linked to difficulties with addition, subtraction and fractions. Participants also indicated that many workers would need to brush up on math skills before they could take advantage of training for another trade.

Participants` Comments

People need to brush up on math. Things like adding, subtracting, fractions.

I`m slow in math. Need to brush up.

A lot of people don`t know how to read a ruler, use a tape measure, figure square footage. Things like that.

Often labels give directions in `10 parts to 1 part`. Why can`t they say `10 ounces to 1 ounce` or so many ounces per gallon?

4. Writing

Writing was identified as an area for improvement and included:

- clearly communicating thoughts in writing
- spelling
- improving penmanship
- grammar
- writing resumes

Need for skills upgrading

Two focus groups and 62% of individual participants identified limited writing skills as an area of need. Much of the writing that workers have to do is on work orders. Although some felt that people are able to relate what they have done in the "Comments" section of the work order, several participants indicated a problem with penmanship. The need for improving writing skills became more apparent, however, when people had to write notes and short memos about problems or work that needed to be done. Several participants also mentioned the need for instruction in filling out work-related forms and applications.

Participants` Comments

A lot of people need help in organizing their thinking before writing. People just write and they turn it in without rereading it to see if it makes sense.

Often things are not clearly written. For example, leaving notes about work that needs to be done. The notes are not clear. They don`t clearly describe the problem or the work to be done.

People don`t admit when they don`t understand what is written.

5. Basic Computer

Learning basic computer skills was an area of high interest.

Need for Skills Upgrading

Three focus groups and 31% of individual participants identified the need to learn basic computer skills. Most participants believe that computer use will increase at Residence Operations and referred to the computerized system for work orders as an example. Participants felt that computer skills will be needed by more staff in the future, particularly by supervisors. They visioned how a computer on each supervisor`s desk could provide easier access to information and improve the accuracy of work reporting and record-keeping. One participant also pointed out that, once people knew basic computer skills, they could use computers to learn math, reading, and other subjects.

When speaking of what they wanted to learn themselves, participants mentioned computer training the most frequently after basic trades. This may be due to several factors. Participants believe that computer skills will become more important at the workplace. Computers are also relevant to people`s personal lives. Perhaps more importantly, this is an area for which it is easy to admit a lack of knowledge. There is little embarrassment in not knowing much about computers as compared to areas such as reading or math.

Participants` Comments

Before too long every office will have a computer and everybody should have computer training.

I don`t know if I`m smart enough for learning a computer.

I think most of the supervisors would be interested in learning computer. I talked to about 10 people who are interested.

I`d love to learn computer! My friend does everything on his computer—his car records, home records. I`d like to know how to do that.

6. Oral Communication

Nearly all participants identified the need for better oral communication and listening skills.

Need for Skills Upgrading

All three focus groups and 23% of individual participants identified improving communication as a particularly important need and one that had a significant impact on the work environment in general.

Among workers—Participants spoke of the need for improving employees` skills in talking to each other and learning to understand each other better. They felt that, often, people cannot clearly express what they want to say and, as a result, those they are speaking to are offended. This was seen as a problem among English-speaking workers as well as for those with limited English skills. [See section on "Cultural Diversity" for a related discussion.]

Between supervisors and workers—Supervisors need to communicate effectively with many types of people, including their own staff, Residence Hall and Quad Directors, people outside their department, and administrative staff. However, participants felt that many supervisors needed to improve their oral communication skills. Some participants described this as "knowing how to talk to people" and showing respect. In other cases, participants spoke in terms of problem-solving skills and knowing how to offer constructive criticism.

Participants also talked at length about the need for improved listening skills and dealing with feedback in a positive way. Several indicated that suggestions from workers were not welcomed or, at times, even acknowledged. Although many felt that workers often had good solutions to problems, the larger issue was about being listened to and having one`s ideas considered even if the ideas were not followed.

Between departments—Participants also discussed the need for better communication among the trades and between the Custodial and Maintenance Departments. They felt that better communication would result in jobs being planned more logically and less work having to be redone. Participants felt that a primary benefit from better communication among departments would be more effective management of time.

With University students and Residence Hall staff—Participants spoke of the need for improved communications with University students and Residence Hall staff, particularly with regard to work requests. Many students and staff do not speak English well, and workers have a difficult time understanding what is needed. However, participants said that English-speaking students and Housing staff also are not able to clearly describe the work that is required. Participants felt this is because they do not understand the "maintenance world" and do not know maintenance terms. Because of these unclear work requests, extra time is spent going to and from work areas to get the right equipment and supplies and, at times, to involve additional workers. The result is inefficient use of workers` time and a great deal of frustration.

Need for Complementary Organizational Strategies

A related factor involving communication was limited access to information. Participants spoke about the need for improving the flow of information to all employees. Some felt that, at times, information was withheld knowingly. But most indicated that it was mainly due to a poor system for getting information out to workers. They felt that management may not aware of workers` interest in knowing about work-related plans and decisions. Some participants also felt that information about training opportunities or other items of interest to the general workforce were not being passed down on a regular basis. Participants felt that, if all workers had more information about the plans and operation of Residence Operations, people could work smarter, there would be less stress, and workers would be able to contribute their knowledge of the job to make Residence Operations more productive and a better place to work.

Participants` Comments

We think what we`ve said has been clearly received, but it`s not always comprehended. The problem is with English-speaking employees as well as non-English-speaking employees.

Supervisors need a course in communication. Communication is a two-way street.

There should be management classes—more psychology. How to talk to men, how not to talk down to them. Every supervisor should go for something like that. Don`t browbeat your men.

Compliment, acknowledge good work. Don't just take good work for granted. People feel like working harder when good work is acknowledged.

Supervisors should listen to opinions of workers. Workers understand the time needed and logical ways to do jobs.

People don't want to speak because they get in trouble. So they keep it inside. This results in stress, depression. People prefer to take the harassment and keep working. They don't want to be known as a trouble-maker.

Feedback, opinions are not acknowledged or passed on up the chain of command. Then later, if the issue comes up, the fact that a worker had made a suggestion earlier to solve the problem is ignored.

Understanding the [overall picture] would make it easier for workers to do their job.

7. Basic Trades Skills

Improving basic trades skills and learning new trades was an area of high interest among Maintenance staff and also among several Custodial staff.

Need for Skills Upgrading

Two focus groups, several individual Custodial participants, all Maintenance participants, and management and union leadership indicated that there was a need for upgrading basic trades skills. Much of this need results from the former practice of promoting staff based on seniority rather than skill. The Maintenance Department now gives practical exams as part of job promotion and hiring above the SG-9 level.

Participants expressed a need for training in most of the trades areas; however, participants indicated carpentry, plumbing, electricity and blueprint reading, as most needed or of most interest. Other trades areas, listed according to interest/need priority, include HVAC, masonry, welding, locksmithing, and asbestos removal.

Several participants were interested in learning advanced trades skills such as cabinet making, schematics, electrical codes, and industrial electricity. [See "Reported Need for Skills Upgrading," Appendix C.]

Participants` Comments

I`d like to take anything in carpentry—hanging doors, doing floors, chalk lines, anything like that.

There is a machine shop and a welding shop on campus in Academic areas. Students come here to learn it, why can`t we?

A lot of people came through the ranks of seniority and there`s a lot of unskilled workers here now. They need to learn about the trade they`re in to live up to the job specs. They should be forced to learn.

It would make my job a lot easier if they knew their job. With them being unskilled it reflects on our work.

Everybody needs to learn blueprint reading.

8. Other Basic Skills Areas

GED

Two focus groups and 24% of the individual participants suggested that an opportunity be provided for workers to complete their high school education through a GED program offered on campus.

Test-Taking

One focus group and one individual participant indicated the need for preparing workers to take Civil Service examinations. Some felt that a class in how to study for and take tests would be useful. Others suggested that a better way be found to inform workers about when Civil Service Tests are offered.

Spanish

19% of the individual participants indicated interest in a Spanish class being offered for English-speaking staff.

C. Barriers To and Interest In Learning

Barriers

Participants were asked what they thought the barriers to getting involved in skills upgrading programs would be. According to participants, potential barriers include:

Scheduling barriers

- classes conflicting with work schedules
- vacations of workers
- people having to come back for classes after leaving work
- classes conflicting with people's second jobs
- classes held after work

Location barriers

- no space for class
- classes located far from the University

Barriers within people

- fear and embarrassment about not having the skills
- fear of failing
- people changing their minds in mid-stream
- lack of commitment
- unwillingness to participate on their own time
- tiredness at the end of the day
- lack of interest/motivation
- lack of prerequisite skills, e.g., English, reading, math
- no need for speaking English off the job.

System barriers:

- lack of career ladder
- lack of supervisor support
- access to classes determined by "political" factors
- limited availability of the classes
- excluding part-time workers from participation
- poor quality classes
- cost of classes

Interest in Learning

Participants rated the interest of Custodial and Maintenance staff in upgrading their skills as medium to high. Reasons for wanting to improve skills included:

- personal growth
- to re-educate oneself
- to perform one's job better
- job mobility among the trades at the same level
- job advancement
- to move from Custodial into a trades position
- a challenge mentally
- to receive a certificate or license
- to apply skills outside the workplace
- to get off work

D. Scheduling and Accessibility of Programs

Program Site

Participants were asked about the location of programs. Most felt that programs should be offered on campus if at all possible. They felt it would be significantly easier for people to attend classes and would avoid parking problems.

However, participants recognize that some classes may need to be held off campus, for example trades classes that require a well-equipped teaching facility. In this case, participants suggested:

- arranging group transportation with University buses or mini-vans
- trying to schedule classes so as to avoid major traffic times

Also, participants indicated that some programs might need to be off campus if there are not enough participants to hold a class at the University.

Scheduling

All participants agreed that classes should not be scheduled on Monday or Tuesday because of heavy work loads. Some felt that payday might interfere with Wednesday classes. Most said that Thursday and Friday would be the best days for classes. Many felt that classes should be held two times a week. Participants also said that the first part of the summer was too busy and that programs could not realistically begin until July or even September.

Participants preferred that classes be held during work time, but several were willing to attend classes half on work time and half on their own time. All agreed that classes should not be scheduled in the morning. Most felt that afternoons would be best and many would prefer them at the end of the day. Custodial participants also raised the issue of making classes accessible to workers from both shifts.

Participants` Comments

Training programs are VERY important. They should be done on a regular basis.

Have classes toward the end of the day so people don`t have to go back to work after class.

I`d love to do it on state time. A lot of people won`t do it on their time.

Courses tied directly to skills needed on the job should be on the clock. Other courses could be on people`s own time or half on the clock and half on their own time.

Make it mandatory to go to class, have it tied to upgrading.

Classes should <u>not</u> be mandatory. <u>Voluntary!</u>

Offer trade skills campus-wide so everybody can get a shot at it

Courses should be open to part-timers if they pay CSEA dues.

Don`t have only certain people go! Open it up to all of Residence workers. Everybody should have the chance who wants to.

E. Cultural Diversity

Residence Operations has a culturally diverse workforce, and problems related to this diversity often centered around situations in which language was an issue. Participants did not discuss cultural diversity issues related to race, gender, or age.

Participants comments focused on problems in communication, feelings and perceptions, and the need for learning English. It should be noted that findings reported in this section are based only on reports from English-speaking and bilingual workers. The consultant did not interview non-English-speaking workers. (See "Value and Limitations of the Assessment," page 8.)

Problems in Communication

Focus groups and individual participants spoke of communication problems between English-speaking and limited-English-speaking employees. According to participants, this barrier often results in frustration and, at times, avoidance of each other, often making it difficult for people of different language backgrounds to work together effectively. Participants also indicated a problem with University students and staff who do not speak English well enough to clearly describe maintenance or custodial work requests.

Participants` Comments

Spanish people don`t understand what you`re trying to explain.

People speak broken English. I understand them [but some others can`t].

It`s hard to communicate with Spanish-speaking people. They don`t seem to listen. They either didn`t hear it or they don`t want to.

During work [the communication] seems to be ok, but for meetings, etc. they have to get in a union interpreter.

Especially in Custodial, communication between English- and Spanish-speaking people is a problem. Things become chaotic.

Feelings and Perceptions

Participants indicated that this difficulty with communication impacts employees at a personal, feeling level. Participants acknowledged that not understanding a co-worker`s language makes them uncomfortable, distrustful, frustrated, and sometimes angry. Most felt that people should learn to speak English, and some participants felt that people who had not learned English were lazy or did not care to learn.

Participants` Comments

The Spanish people don`t try to speak English. I tell `em, `People think you`re talking about them if you`re talking Spanish in a group of English-speakers.

By not learning English after they have been in the U.S. for a long time, they show they don`t care. They don`t want to learn.

The Spanish people are very cliquish.

With English-speaking people, Spanish people should speak English.

Don't treat [Spanish-speaking workers] like children just because they don't understand English.

Spanish-speaking people who don't know how to speak English are shunned. Isolated. People who can't speak English can't talk with people on the job. It's really a complex issue.

When people don't know English, they are shy to get involved with American people.

Need for English

Participants described several job-related needs for knowing how to speak English. These included being able to work effectively with supervisors and other workers, responding to requests from University students, getting full benefit from training that is offered, advancing to other positions, and understanding work rules and policies. However, one participant felt that there was little need for speaking English at entry-level custodial jobs. (See also "English as a Second Language," page 11.)

Participants's Comments

It's needed to be able to work together.

[Limited-English-speaking] workers have to speak with students sometimes. They tell the worker "I need a broom, I need a mop, etc."

Hispanic people don't understand basic work rules, policies.

A lot of people want to advance, but they can't understand English or, if they can understand it, they can't speak it.

Need for Complementary Organizational Strategies

Some participants felt that greater efforts should be made to ensure that Spanish-speaking employees receive the same information as English-speaking employees. One participant suggested that more instructions should be written in Spanish, citing the example of Personal Protection Kits in Spanish and English. Several participants said that more training should be translated for Spanish-speaking employees.

For example, when they have women's safety training, they had a Spanish officer there. But the meeting and film about Hepatitis B vaccine didn't have a translator there. So those who don't understand English really don't understand what it's all about. Training should be offered to everybody. Provide a translator if necessary.

One example of this strategy is a work rule book in Spanish that the union expects to have ready by summer. Also, two union officers are Hispanic and often provide translation services for union-related issues.

F. Visions of Change

Focus group participants were asked to work in small groups to develop a vision of what Residence Operations would look like in one year if the basic skills upgrading needs they had identified were met and the barriers to communication gone. The following statements are the result of that work. They are presented verbatim with some expansion editing to clarify meaning.

1. · The workplace would be more open.
   · There would be better understanding of each department.
   · We would be a more unified workforce.
   · Work can start blending and flowing to get the maximum work production.
   · All department supervisors and lead persons meet on a regular basis.
   · Supervisors would have had a group discussion with their staff before hand so they can bring their issues/suggestions to the supervisors meeting.
   · Communication and working together would be better.
   · Grounds would look much better, the landscaping and papers picked up all over campus.

2. · The entire work order process would be computerized.
   · Every place would have a computer, information would be entered in and immediately available at all the areas. Information would be accurate and up-to-date.
   · If the computers would be fully utilized, there would be a LOT less paperwork. Also, there would be less people, especially administrative people, working here.
   · You'd have some very frustrated employees because there would be no place to use their education—little upward mobility. People want to reap the benefits from the training they take.

3. A group drawing was done in bright colors showing:

   · a happy face, representing how people would feel at work
   · a rainbow, representing happiness and promise
   · a person in jail, a prisoner
   · several buildings representing the University with these words added below: "If everything is positive, this is going to be a wonderful place to work and study. And I think the workers are going to have a better relation[ship] with the students."

4. · It would be cleaner.
   · A zoo
   · Dirty
   · People would be calmer
   · People would be understanding and more wise.
   · There would be less tension.
   · People would be happy to come to work.
   · People would be working together.
   · There would be loyalty.
   · People would be dedicated.
   · There would be a sense of freedom.
   · People would feel peaceful.

5. A group drawing was done in bright colors showing:

   · a tree, representing people growing up
   · a happy face, showing people being very pleased
   · a car, representing people feeling good going to work
   · stick figures with happy faces, representing people working together
   · another group of stick figures, representing good leadership

6. · Workers would be better qualified.
   · There would be good morale.
   · There would be more productivity.
   · People would be treated with more respect.
   · There would be better time management.
   · Work would be exciting.
   · People would be enjoying the job.

7. · There would be no racism.
   · There would be joy.
   · There would be love.
   · There would be peace.
   · sketch of a happy face—"Don`t worry. Be happy"
   · $$ (things take money)

G. Participants' Suggestions Regarding Basic Skills Programs and Complementary Strategies

Participants offered many suggestions about the content of basic skills classes and how they should be conducted. They also proposed several complementary strategies for addressing related issues.

1. Basic Skills Programs

ESL Program

All participants considered it important that an ESL program be job-related. Several suggested that the instructor use actual objects from the work site and provide many opportunities for practicing the language. They felt that it is not enough for people to understand English terms and phrases, they must also be able to "say them back."

Participants suggested topics for ESL classes for Custodial workers including:

- conversation among workers and supervisors, for example,
  "The carpet hasn't been vacuumed this weekend. Please get it as soon as possible."

- products and equipment, for example:
  "This is ammonia. This is Ajax. We use Ajax for the sink."

- names of the people they work with, and

- general job-related vocabulary, for example:
  "floating holiday," "personal day," "carry the beeper"

Participants felt that ESL classes for Maintenance workers should also teach conversation needed among Maintenance workers and supervisors and the general job-related vocabulary listed above. In addition, participants recommended that the program focus on trades-specific vocabulary. Participants felt that, although some limited-English-speaking workers know the names of basic tools, most needed to learn English names for specialty tools, for example, "round-tooth file." One participant suggested that it would be useful for workers to have a book with pictures of tools and equipment, along with their English names.

Participants also indicated that the ESL program should also deal with job-related reading, writing, and math. One person pointed out that, if basic reading, writing, and math classes are offered in English, they are of no help to workers who do not speak English but who may also need to improve their reading, writing, and math skills.

Participants offered several suggestions about how ESL classes should be conducted.

1. They should include different levels.

   Don`t mix levels. Not one teacher for all, to cover all levels.

2. Instructors should be aware of workers` native literacy skills.

   If a person doesn`t read or write very well in Spanish, he feels embarrassed to be in an ESL class where others know how to read and write in [their native language].

3. Ensure that the curriculum and teaching are of high quality.

   Show you are serious about people learning, like regular school. Pace the learning. Give homework, expect serious work. Then be sure the teacher goes over the homework. Be serious about whether people learn!

   If you had classes like that, there would be more students. Another benefit—people would want to work here just to take the program.

Math Program

Participants emphasized that basic math skills should be tied it to what people do on their job. They felt that many workers needed to brush up on skills such as adding, subtracting, and working with fractions and decimals. Several mentioned the need for training in using a calculator. In addition, specific suggestions were made for workers in each department.

For Custodial staff:
- supply requests—keeping a tally of what`s in stock. Involves addition and subtraction.
- using a calculator
- volume measurement units, e.g., 1/2 cup, pint, etc.
- ratios and percentages used in mixing cleaning solutions

For Maintenance staff:
- how to read a ruler or a tape measure
- measuring and figuring square footage
- using a calculator
- math problems—steps to move through logically in solving a problem
- prerequisite math for the trades

Some participants also suggested training in understanding how salary pay scales work. Others indicated a need for learning the metric system and an interest in advanced math subjects such as algebra, trigonometry, and calculus.

Writing Program

Participants had several suggestions about what to include in a writing program. Some suggestions were for job-related writing; others were more generic skills.

For Custodial staff:
- writing course for supervisors, janitors and everybody
- letters
- organizing your thinking before writing
- forms
- short memos
- spelling job-related words
- grammar
- writing resumes

For Maintenance staff:
- penmanship
- writing clearly
- filling out work orders
- short memos
- spelling trades-related words
- grammar
- writing resumes

Oral Communication Course

Participants suggesting offering a course in oral communication and listening skills. They emphasized that it be opened to all Custodial and Maintenance staff.

Basic Trades Programs

Participants were unanimous in stressing that trades training needs to be practical and thorough. The programs need to:
- have a step-by-step curriculum,
- be hands-on,
- use a variety of learning methods,
- give adequate time for practice, and
- be for a long enough period of time to allow for real learning

Many stressed the importance of the training being accredited with a state-recognized certificate for successful completion. If tuition is involved, the recommendation was that it be on a reimbursement basis rather than up-front payment by Residence Operations.

Participants` Comments

We need hands-on training. Teach people, show people.

I went through a course [at Maritime] in one day. Didn`t learn much. The guy just talked. You could ask questions, but it was so much thrown at you, you didn`t even know what to ask. Training needs to be a couple of days a week, a couple of hours at a time.

[The training should be] not just all words, but pictures. A combination of both, something visual, animated.

Training needs to be practical. Working with your own hands. Let`s be realistic.

Trades training should be basic stuff, from an accredited school with a certificate at the end, like a BOCES.

Trades training should be a full course where you end up with a certification in the trade. Not like Maritime where it`s only for two days, 12 hours. You can`t learn anything in two days.

2. Complementary Strategies

Participants had several suggestions for addressing the issues raised during discussions about improving communication at Residence Operations.

Stress Management

One focus group identified stress as a major factor affecting communication and morale at Residence Operations. Participants offered two suggestions for improving employees` ability to deal with job-related stress:

Offer a stress management course. Participants felt that stress management skills can be learned and considered it important that the course be offered to all employees.

Offer an exercise program. One participant felt that exercise can provide a positive outlet for stress and help job productivity. "Unwind, push weights, burn off a little steam and aggravation." It was suggested that Residence Operations employees be allowed access to gyms or to Quad exercise areas during their lunch hour. "We may not live on campus, but we`re part of the community, too."

Work Group Meetings

Focus group participants suggested that supervisors hold meetings on a regular basis with their work group. They felt it would also be useful to, at times, invite students and Housing staff. The purpose for these meetings would be to:

- pass information down from upper management,
- provide an opportunity for people to talk to each other and air problems, and
- give workers an opportunity to express their viewpoint "on why things aren`t getting done."

Training Session for "Live-Here" Staff and Students

Participants recommended holding a session(s) to explain maintenance work terminology for Residence Housing staff and students. As part of this training, participants suggested developing a book or list of maintenance terms that students and residence staff could use as a reference when making work requests.

Course about Residence Operations

Participants suggested offering a course that would explain the business of running Residence Operations. Such a course should present the overall picture of Residence Operations, its requirements as a business component of the University, and specific job responsibilities of all staff. It was felt that, if employees understood the overall picture of the business, they could work smarter, there would be less stress and better problem-solving. It was emphasized that this was not to be seen as a threat to supervisors and management but, rather, as a way to improve productivity and make for a more positive, involved work force.

Sharing ONA Report and Information about Programs

As part of providing better access to information to workers, participants indicated that it was important to share the results of the ONA with all employees. They also stressed that, when Project REACH programs begin, information about what is being offered is given to all employees.

Participants` Comments

Have the final information report sent to everybody, not just bits and pieces. The Advisory Committee needs to get it to everybody. It should be posted in every shop.

Get the Executive Summary out to the Quad offices.

Have a one-page sheet telling people what`s in the report. Give it to all the supervisors.

Make sure information about the classes gets shared with everyone. It is a problem here...the `chosen` few get the information.

Let people know about the classes. Send out letters. Tell them what`s coming up now and in two months.

IV. Recommendations

A. Introduction

The recommendations that follow provide suggestions for short- and long-term strategies that Residence Operations could undertake to address basic skills needs identified in this report.

B. Short-Term Recommendations

The workforce education consultant recommends that the following steps be taken before a plan for Project REACH is developed and implemented:

1. Ensure that Project REACH Advisory Committee members read the full report and give their feedback.

2. Provide the opportunity for all Residence Operations employees to receive a briefing on the findings and recommendations from the report.

3. Make the Executive Summary of the report available to all employees. This would include making the Spanish translation of the Executive Summary available to all Spanish-speaking employees.

4. Make the full report available to all employees upon request.

C. Long-Term Recommendations

Develop an action plan with the Project REACH Advisory Committee for providing basic skills upgrading opportunities for Custodial and Maintenance employees. Use the findings from this report and suggestions made by employees as a basis for the plan. As training is developed, involve supervisors, workers, management, and union leadership in determining the content and methodology of each program.

Project REACH programs should be offered on a voluntary basis to employees, with all Custodial and Maintenance employees receiving information about the programs on a timely basis.

Education providers could include GOER/CSEA, BOCES, other area institutions, and consultants. Providers should be skilled in a participatory approach to course development and instruction. Providers should work with the Advisory Committee and GOER/CSEA in ensuring that programs are customized to meet the specific needs of Residence Operations employees.

Following are recommendations for specific programs and related strategies.

Basic Skills Training

1. Develop a *work-related ESL program* for Custodial and Maintenance workers. Because of the differing vocabulary needs and work-related conversation of the two departments, separate ESL courses for workers in each department would have a higher impact and could also generate mutual support among work groups. Involve supervisors and English-speaking workers from each department in determining the vocabulary and conversation skills to be included in the curriculum.

2. Provide a program that teaches *basic math skills* in the context of work-related math tasks in the Custodial and Maintenance Departments. The program could also include pre-requisite math skills required in order to enroll in trades-related training.

3. Provide a *basic reading and writing skills* program that incorporates work-related reading and writing tasks. Use a holistic approach to learning that is based on employees' individual ability levels and learning goals.

4. Offer training in *basic computer skills.* Explore the possibility of a computer-based learning center for Residence Operations employees.

5. Offer training in *oral communication and listening skills.* Build in follow-up activities that are work-related and that encourage employees to apply those skills in daily work relationships.

Trades Training

1. Provide hands-on, practical training in basic trades skills. Based on the results of this needs assessment, the first priority would be *basic carpentry skills,* followed by *plumbing, electricity, and blueprint reading.* Have the courses on-site if possible, and ensure that training meets the specific needs of Residence Operations employees. This would include beginning where workers are in their knowledge of the trade and proceeding at a pace that fits participants' learning rates.

2. Explore ways of providing incentives and support for employees who want to upgrade their skills into more *advanced areas of the trades.*

Other Strategies

1. Implement a *team-based process for evaluating Project REACH.* A team approach to evaluation can build a sense of shared purpose and ownership, and provide valuable guidance for program development. Working with a GOER/CSEA consultant, the Advisory Committee could serve as the core team which would:
   - clarify the goals,
   - identify what is and is not working in the programs,
   - build on Project REACH's strengths, and
   - deal with its limitations.

2. Develop a *book of maintenance terms* for use in:
   - a training session for Residence Hall and Quad Directors and University students (see No. 3 below)
   - an ESL program for Maintenance workers, and
   - a trades-related reading and writing program.

   Involve Maintenance staff in deciding which terms to include and in developing working definitions for those terms. In addition to having a workplace-specific learning tool for the programs listed above, staff participation in its development would:
   - build ownership in the programs which use the books,
   - develop teamwork and problem-solving skills, and
   - enhance self esteem by building on workers' knowledge of their trades and the work processes of Residence Operations.

   A similar book of custodial terms could be developed for use in an ESL program for Custodial workers and custodial-related reading and writing instruction.

3. Develop a *training session for Residence Hall Directors and University students* to acquaint them with "the world of maintenance." The purpose would be to improve communications involving requests for maintenance work. The training would:
   · provide staff and students with a better understanding of how the Maintenance Department operates,

   · explain common maintenance terms, and

   · provide practice in using those terms to report maintenance problems.

   The main learning tool for this training could be the book of maintenance terms referred to in No. 3 above. To ensure realistic content and to optimize communication benefits, involve maintenance supervisors, workers, and management in determining the content of the training and also in conducting the sessions.

4. Offer a *course in the overall operations of the Division of Residence Operations.* The course would give employees "the big picture" of their Division and its operations and responsibilities. Employees would gain a better understanding of their own role and the roles of co-workers in providing the Division's services to University residences. It could also enhance teamwork and problem-solving within and between departments.

5. Offer a *stress management course* for all levels of employees. Explore the possibility of instituting an *exercise program,* either as formally-organized classes or as informal access to on-campus exercise facilities.

6. Consider ways that *communication within work groups and between departments* can be improved. This could include regular meetings of supervisors with their work groups as well as interdepartmental planning and problem-solving meetings.

D. Summary Statement

In order for Residence Operations to address the findings and recommendations in this report, it will be necessary to develop a specific plan of action for Project REACH. The implementation of the plan will require the further input, talents, and commitment of all levels of the work force at Residence Operations.

In conclusion, Residence Operations is to be commended for its commitment to the continuing education of its employees and, particularly, for its focus on providing basic skills opportunities for Custodial and Maintenance staff. It is the impression of this consultant that Residence Operations has a rich resource of thoughtful, creative people who can make Project REACH an innovative, cutting-edge example of participatory workplace education.

The Governor's Office of Employee Relations and the Civil Service Employees Association look forward to providing further assistance to this exciting, forward-thinking initiative.

Appendix A

Focus Group Agenda

Part A

1. Work individually.

   Think of three areas where Custodial and Maintenance staff may want or need to upgrade their basic skills. Write each area on a 3 x 5 card.

   Then, think of three barriers that make written communication difficult to understand here at the workplace. Write each barrier on a 3 x 5 card.

2. Work in small groups of two or three.

   Come to a consensus on (a) skill upgrading needs and (b) barriers you listed in #1.

   Elect a spokesperson to present a summary of your discussion to the whole group.

3. Spokesperson for each group presents a summary of the small group discussions in #2 to the whole group.

Part B

As a whole group, brainstorm:

- ways to address the training needs identified in Part A.
- factors at the workplace that would affect the success of these strategies.
- other activities that would complement skills upgrading activities

Part C—Visioning Activity

1. Work in groups of two or three.

   Imagine it is a year from now.

   a. All the basic skills programs you have recommended are in place to address the needs you have identified. What does the workplace look like? What do the programs look like?

   b. All the barriers to oral and written communication have been addressed. What does the workplace look like? What has been put in place to address the barriers?

2. Share your group's vision with the whole group.

Appendix B

Individual Meeting Questions

A. Icebreaker

1. Would you tell me a little about what you do here?
2. Do you work in a team or do you work alone?
3. How long have you worked here?
4. What kind of changes have you seen since you've worked here, especially those that might call for new employee skills?

B. Workplace Education and Basic Skills Upgrading

1. What kind of reading, writing, and math, do people in your job/position do?
2. Who do you communicate with at work? What do you communicate about (in writing or verbally)?
3. What are the main areas that people might want or need to upgrade their basic skills?
4. What kind of basic skills programs do you think should be offered?
5. Should programs be offered on or off the work site? Why or why not?
6. When should they be offered?
7. What might prevent people from participating in a basic skills program?
8. On a scale of 1 to 10, how interested do you think people would be in upgrading their skills if the opportunity were there? (1 is not interested, 10 is very interested)

C. Other Information

1. What kind of training is offered here?
2. What work materials do people find difficult to read? How could they be improved?
3. How do cultural differences affect you?
4. What would you like to learn so badly you would pay someone to let you learn it?
5. What ideas do you have for ways that Campus Residence or CSEA could make reading, writing and communication easier for workers?

Appendix C

Reported Need for Skills Upgrading

Course	% of Individuals				Focus Groups
	Custodial	Trades	Mgmt. CSEA	All	
Basic Computer	33	38	—	31	3
Reading—Basic	56	54	75	58	2
Reading—Advanced	22	8	—	12	—
ESL	67	69	100	73	2
Work Terminology for "Live-Here" Staff	—	8	—	12	2
Math—Basic	67	54	75	62	2
Math—Advanced	—	8	—	4	2
Spelling	11	8	25	12	—
Writing—Basic	44	38	75	46	2
Writing—Advanced	—	8	—	4	1
Spanish	22	8	—	12	—
GED	33	15	50	27	2
Test-Taking	11	—	—	4	1
Oral Communication	22	23	50	23	3
Stress Management	—	—	—	—	1
Business Operations	22	—	—	4	2
Exercise Program	—	—	—	—	1
Trades:					
Asbestos Removal	—	—	—	—	1
Blueprint Reading	—	38	25	23	—
Carpentry—Basic	22	62	50	46	2
Carpentry—Advanced	—	15	25	8	—
Electricity—Basic	11	38	50	31	2
Electricity—Advanced	—	23	25	15	—
Electronics	—	8	25	8	—
HVAC	—	31	—	15	2
Locksmithing	—	—	25	4	—
Masonry	—	15	—	8	—
Plumbing	22	31	25	27	2
Welding	—	8	—	4	1

Other

Work-Related:
- learning to learn
- alcohol and drug awareness
- using insecticides
- hands-on training with custodial machines
- purchasing process
- assertiveness training

Not Work-Related:
- VCR programming
- the stock market
- car body repair
- how to make my money stretch
- interior decorating
- custom painting
- using the public library
- accounting